

GenX: This Space(ship) for Rent

by Abyss

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Summary: Dammit, Jim! I'm a mutant teenager, not a starship pilot!!!

GenX: This Space(ship) for Rent

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Genereation X: This Space(ship) for Rent

By Abyss

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ABYSSmal Productions presents those kookie kids of Generation X in...

\*\* Generation X; This Space(ship) for Rent \*\*

(or... The Fficdom Menace)

Hiya kiddies... Abyss here, with my first ever Generation X story.

Now, to be fair, I bailed out of the comic about when Toad put in an appearance. So, for continuity's sake, if you care, this takes place shortly after Jono beat up on Omega Red. Don't expect massive angst or character development. I'm just in this for the fun of it... now then, let's take a step back in time, shall we...?

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\*\*\*\*\*

---The Massachusetts Academy. Morning.---

"EMMA!"

\*You DO know you could simply thoughtcast. I know for a fact Charles Xavier taught you how.\*

\*Some of us, lass, prefer to do things face to face, now where are ye?\*

"Right behind you."

Sean Cassidy turned to find himself almost nose to nose with Emma Frost, former White Queen of the Hellfire Club and current headmistress to his headmaster at the Xavier Massachusetts Institute for Gifted Students.

"You're getting slow, Banshee. A former Interpol operative should not be that easy to sneak up on."

Sean took a step back. Even after the last few months of living side by side with her, it was still an act of will to keep his eyes on her face. She was wearing one of her more... modest... outfits. A white leather pantsuit that looked painted on.

"I was distracted by yer thoughtcall. That, and all the racket outside. Mind tellin' me what it's about?"

"Just having a few things delivered, Sean. Nothing to worry about."

Sean pointed out the open front door to the 18-wheeler being unloaded by six large men and a forklift.

"Woman, the last time we had a delivery that big was when Monet had her belongings delivered, and even they, they dinna need a blessed forklift ta do the job!"

Emma Frost sighed dramatically and walked out the front door onto the veranda. Sean followed, clenching his teeth so hard his head hurt.

"Fine. If you must know..."

"I must."

"What you're looking at is the packaged remains of a Shi'ar transport that crashed in the North Atlantic eight years ago."

Banshee did a double take and looked closely at the cargo being unloaded. The boxes and crates were all carefully sealed, and on closer inspection, he could see many of them were intricately locked and fixed for maximum security and damage prevention. His first question caused Emma to raise one eyebrow. She was still being impressed by the man's perceptiveness. Anyone else would have asked the more obvious question.

"Where's the rest of it at?"

"Bulkheads, engines, and most of the superstructure were long since smelted and used in various Frost Industry projects. What you see here is the cargo and most of the computer and control technology."

Sean seemed to consider this before asking the question Emma considered more obvious.

"An' how, exactly, did Frost Industries come to possess such a wonder?"

"Think Sean. Eight years ago."

"I was still with the X-Men then, Emma... I... of course! That was the first time Lilandra sent Shi'ar technology to renovate the mansion."

"Indeed. One ship, however, went astray for whatever reason. My assets found it and secured it."

"Yours... or the Hellfire Club's?"

"Mine, Sean. One does not deal with those of Sebastian Shaw and Donald Pierce's ilk and not keep a few things to oneself."

"Very clever of you. Why bring it here?"

"I offered it to Charles Xavier, basically as spare parts, given the recent strains on the X-men's relationship with the Shi'ar. Henry McCoy is supposed to arrive shortly to see if there is anything of use to us here at the academy before moving the rest of it to Westchester."

"Most generous."

"I do have my moments, Mister Cassidy."

"I trust there's nothing dangerous in any of these crates, seeing's as how we are a school, with the students ta prove it."

"It's just disassembled communications and Med-tech modules. None of it is even attached to a power source."

"Very well then. I see you're storing it in the auditorium. Nothing there it can react with."

"Relax, Sean. Nothing can possibly happen."

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(Abyssmal note: all together now... "FAMOUS LAST WORDS!" ;)  
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"So what's it look like to you?"

"It looks like a bunch of boxes and crates being unloaded to the auditorium. What do you think it looks like?"

"Maybe Sean and Frosty finally decided to get that Megaplex Home Theatre 3000 system I've been bugging them about."

Everett Thomas pushed up the rim of his baseball cap and looked at Jubilation Lee with something between humour and utter disbelief.

"Jubes...", he said, leaning against the tree they were using as a backrest while studying for Linear Algebra, "Banshee made it quite clear that would happen... and I quote; 'when Doctor Doom has his armour customised by Bill Nye'."

"Yeah, but his eyes lit up when I told him we could play the 'Lord of the Dance' soundtrack in stereophonic super-surround sound. I'm telling ya, Ev', this could be it!"

"Don't hold your breath."

He pitched a twig at her. She pouted and swatted at the rim of his cap.

"If you children are quite done, some of us are trying to study here."

As one they looked up towards the source of the voice. Perched amidst the branches of the tree, Monet St. Croix looked down, figuratively and literally, on her younger team mates from over the edge of a 'Thermonuclear Dynamics for Dummies' textbook. Jubilee would have none of it

"'Scuze-us, miss perfect. Did the serfs disturb the princess in her tower?"

"As impressed as I am that you used the word 'serf' in a sentence, Lee, and correctly, no less, I do have reading to do."

Gathering up her books, M flew off towards another tree, ignoring the stream of verbal abuse floating up from Jubilee's vicinity. Everett sighed and returned to his notes.

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\*You sure you wanna do this?\*

"Look amigo. Sooner or later you're gonna have to throw down with some baddy who can't get hurt by your flame. And sooner or later, I'm gonna have to get used to using all this extra skin in hand-to-hand. Banshee said we should plan our sessions with various partners, so..."

\*Paige, gel, you throw in the towel if this gets ugly, right?\*

Paige Guthrie's voice sounded over the speaker system in the Grotto.

"Ah got it covered, guys. Have fun now, but play nice or I'll hose you down like my mom would the farm dogs."

"Wonderful, chica." Angelo Espinosa murmured. He turned his attention to his opponent and classmate, Jonothon Starsmore, called Chamber. The young englishman was wearing one of the school's dark red training uniforms. The outfit had been modified to include a fold of the unstable molecule fabric that could be bound tightly over the empty space that used to be his chest and lower face. It was designed so that it could be released quickly with one tug at a clasp. Jono rarely wore it, preferring his street cloths and a heavy scarf. Paige had convinced him the suit was more convenient for training. The fact that she thought he looked just a bit 'super-hero'ish' in it was NOT something she would ever confess to. Nor would he confess he wore it because she'd asked.

"Ready?" Angelo asked.

Chamber nodded, his psionic 'voice' sounding in Skin's head like a small bonfire given the power of speech.

\*Aye.\*

Both young men crouched, suddenly wary. Skin had spent most of his life on barrio streets that were only a step away from a war zone, and maybe worse than that. He only knew one way to fight. Fast, dirty, and to win. Chamber, on the other hand, had spent enough of his 'young rebellious years', all two or three there were before the accident that ripped his body apart, hanging in London's lower east side, to have a similar attitude in a fight. By mutual agreement, Angelo did not use his skin to strike out at a distance. That was not the point of the exercise.

They circled, side stepping, each watching the others' eyes for a hint of an attack or feint. At least, Angelo tried to. When your opponent's eyes were flickering orbs of psionic flame, they could be just a bit distracting in themselves. Angelo blinked, red spots dancing before his eyes for just a second. Jono caught his distraction and lunged forward, swinging a right cross at his head. The lunge was from far enough that Angelo saw it coming. His right arm blocked the blow and his left came around in a hard knock to the side of Starsmore's head, high enough to connect only with flesh, not uniform-covered psionic flame. Jono reeled back and Angelo pressed the advantage, throwing a hard right at where most people would have a jaw. Jono leaned back and Skin's knuckles only grazed the scarf, which yielded ever so slightly. Expecting contact with flesh, as he would have had with most normal opponents, Skin flinched. Jono drove a knee into his side. Angelo swung again and missed even as he gasped

and the two jumped apart.

"Everyone okay so far?" Paige's voice sounded on the intercom. Neither of them even paused to acknowledge the question. Skin flew at Chamber, intent on taking him down quickly. Jono caught his left wrist but took a right to the gut. He pulled Skin in close, trying to take advantage of his height and weight to bear the other down to the ground. Skin swept his leg and they both went down, rolling across the grass. Once, twice, and Skin came up on top, his hands wrapped around Jono's neck, distended thumbs pressing. He realized his mistake even as he heard Jono's voice in his head.

\*Can't choke a bloke who don't need to breath, mate.\*

The blow caught Angelo full in the mouth. He fell back and Jono jumped up, aiming a kick at his side. Not exactly sporting, but this was supposed to be realistic. The kick connected and Angelo grabbed hold of the boot. Jono tried to pull back... and found lengths of grey skin wrapped around his leg.

"Level... two... 'mate'!"

Angelo swung his arms and Jono was thrown off his feet, hitting the ground hard. The young hispanic thrust one hand forward and the skin of the fingers extended towards the other's face. Jono waved his arms, pushing the grey mass away. A hard twist and his leg was free before Angelo could really get a grip. He regained his feet even as Angelo barrelled into him, grey strands wrapping tight, holding them both together. Angelo wasn't paying attention to just where his hands went, though. One distended finger struck a clasp at Chamber's neck. A clasp that hadn't been properly fastened earlier. Red-black flame exploded from the suddenly loose neckpiece. With a shout, Angelo threw himself back, trying to untangle his hands from the unexpectedly inflamed Jonothon. The blast of flame struck Angelo in the face. He wasn't burned, but the psionic energy threw him back and into a tree. Hard. Angelo recovered quickly, one hand cradling his head, the other keeping him from falling to the earth. Jono stepped back, hands by his sides.

Paige came running in, a small first aid kit in her hand.

"Jono! Angelo! You hurt?"

Angelo stood. "Fine chica... just a little shaky."

Paige looked at Jono. The flames played across his face, making any semblance of expression unreadable.

"No, really, Chamber, I'm fine. Thanks for worrying." Angelo muttered as Paige pulled an ice pack from the kit. Her eyes kept returning to Jono.

\*Sorry, Ang'.\* Chamber's psionic voice sounded in their heads. The words sounded strangely hollow. Not bothering to refasten the clasp on his neck, Jonothon Starsmore walked out of the grotto.

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(Abyssmal note: Okay, so I threw in a little angst. S'about as bad

as it gets tho'. Just needed to flex my creative muscles with the characters. On with the fun.)

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---Much later that night---

"Tell me again why we're here, Lee?"

"Because, Guthrie, I wanna see what Banshee and Frosty have stored here."

"They told us. It's Shi'ar research material for the X-men, and NOT something we should be messing with."

Clad in long t-shirts and bunny slippers, Jubilation Lee and Paige Guthrie made their way along the hallway of the main building towards the auditorium.

"We're just taking a look. Besides, no one asked you to come along."

"Someone had to keep you out of trouble."

"Che'yeah... and the fact that you might see a real spaceship has nada to do with it, right. Hey..."

"Keep your voice down."

"Why? Are teach and teachette going to hear us all the way from their respective houses? Anyways, look... the kitchen..."

Paige looked. From the doorway at the other side of the lobby area, a flickering could be seen along the wall. Shadows and dim rays of light played across the wood panelling.

"Someone having a late night snack...?" Paige whispered.

"We'll know in a second. Thieves wouldn't stop for munchies."

\*You two gels can stop whispering and just walk in, y'know.\*

Both girls relaxed visibly at the psionic invitation, each silently sure the other was far more tense than she was. They walked into the kitchen to find Jono and Angelo seated at the table. They had traded their training uniforms for jeans and t-shirts. Jono had his usual scarf and black leather jacket on as well. Angelo had a bottle of beer that had definitely not come from the fridge before him. A dark form moved out of the shadows under the table, inhuman blue eyes reflecting the little light in the room as Penance glanced at them once and returned to her plate of apples.

"Evenin' senoritas. Sorry, there's no cake left if you were planning a binge."

"Har-har, skin-spice," Jubilee said. She reached out to take a slice of apple off the plate Penance held towards her, the delicate effort to keep long razor sharp fingers from slicing the plate to plaster shards visible as just a slight furrow in her smooth, stone-like features.

Paige opened her mouth to ask what they were doing there, then decided not to. It probably had something to do with the combat exercise earlier. That meant it was between the two guys... and she could always tease it out of Angelo at Scrabble tomorrow.

"Well, nice seeing you boys, but we got things to do." Jubilee grinned evilly and slid out of the kitchen. Paige glanced in Jono's direction once and followed. Angelo and Jono looked at each other, then sighed, stood up, and followed. Everett was waiting for them all outside the auditorium door.

"What's with the crowd?" he hissed at Jubilee.

"\_You\_ know..." she said absently, proceeding to the wide double doors.

"It's locked. And on a separate security grid. Shutting off the whole system wouldn't affect this."

"Good, then we can all go back to bed." Angelo said, earning a dark look from Jubilee.

"No one sleeps 'til I get my peek."

"In that case, Lee," came an accented voice from the doorway, "best for everyone that I came by, oui?"

Everyone turned as Monet walked down the hall. She was still in her training outfit, and looked as perfectly composed as the others in various stages of sleep-wear did not.

"'Cuz you're gonna bore us all to sleep, M, or you know the code?" was Jubilee's response.

"You talk in your sleep, Jubilation. At least when you're awake, we can ask you to be silent and let others work."

Jubilee's mouth opened and shut a few times as M walked by her and began tinkering with the access panel on the side of the door. Everett couldn't resist licking the tip of his finger and pointing it at Jubilee with a low 'tsss' and a grin. Her glare was near manic.

Angelo leaned against a wall and wished for a cigarette. Paige watched Monet and pretended not to really be watching Chamber. Chamber watched Monet and pretended not to be watching Paige. Then the doors slid open and everyone filed in, Penance bringing up the rear, blue eyes watching everything.

The lights were off, but moonlight from the high windows on either wall offered barely enough illumination to see by. The large crates all stood to one side, the smaller boxes and such to the other. Not a single item was stored on top of another, and each had at least a few feet of space from the next.

"Sparky, see if you can find the lights, will ya?"

"\*It's your party Lee. Decorate it yourself. And don't call me that."



Jubilee turned towards Jono, clasped her hands together and batted her eyelashes.

"I'm sorry." Her voice positively dripped with sugar, " Jonothon, be a dear and find the light, please, because unlike the rest of us who'll trip over our own stylish gorilla slippers, you can light your own way?"

Psionic muttering echoing in all their heads, Jono stomped towards the light-and-sound booth. Jubilee made her way towards one of the boxes. The others followed. Some of the boxes had complex locking systems, wraparound steel bands with LED's that flashed a variety of colours. Others were simpler, masterlock and chain arrangements. Jubilee picked the largest of these. She held the lock in her hand and pointed a finger at the keyhole. Concentrating, she sent a small, bright yellow circle-shaped plasmoid into the hole. An instant later there was an audible 'paf' and a wisp of smoke rose out of the hole. She attempted to pull it open, unsuccessfully.

"Had enough fun for one night, chica?"

"Ang', I haven't even started. Penny, give me a hand here, would you?"

Whether she understood english at all was the subject of some debate in the school, but Penance had shown herself to perceptive, regardless. She edged close to the box. Jubilee stepped back and with an almost slow-motion grace, Penance waved her hand at the lock, long dark red fingers glittering in the moonlight as they seemed to pass through the hardened steel as if it was water. The lock dropped to the ground in three perfectly cut pieces.

"Thanks, Penny. You rock." Jubilee stated, lifting the edge of the box. They all crowded round, even M. Inside the box were many bubble wrapped packages, set inside so as to be braced against each other, allowing nothing to move during shipping. Jubilee reached in and pulled out a package the size of an egg carton.

"Lee, that's no stereo system. Maybe we shouldn't mess with that stuff?" Paige ventured.

"Relax, corncob. Lookee here...", she held up another small gadget that looked like a cross between an Etch-a-sketch and a small laptop computer, "See the writing along the top? That's high Shi'ar." She emphasised 'high' to make it perfectly clear she would recognise any other sort of Shi'ar, "All the really dangerous stuff must be wrapped up in the heavy duty crates with all the lights and sensors. This is nothing but Shi'ar knick-knacks and souvenirs. Trust me. When I was with the X-men..."

A chorus of groans and moans made her close her mouth and busy herself unwrapping the first package. The 'egg-carton' analogy wasn't too far off. It was a small metal box, open at the top, and filled with a soft material looked like styrofoam and felt like silk when Jubilee touched it. Resting in the material were eight small, round metallic orbs, each the size of a robin's egg.

"What are they?" Everett asked.

"Dunno." Jubilee studied them in the poor light. "Looks like there's something written on them... but since Sparky still hasn't gotten the lights up..."

"Here, let me..." Angelo started to say.

It all happened at once. Jubilee held her hand up, forming a red plasmoid the size of her fist. Angelo flicked his lighter on. And Chamber found the lights.

To Jonothon, it seemed that a small explosion went up amongst the boxes right as he turned the lights on. There were several exclamations of surprise from the group that were abruptly cut off. He was blinded for a moment by the sudden light, but the psionic echoes he always felt from other people were abruptly gone. No echoes of pain or panic... just gone. Still blinking, he ran towards where he had seen them last, sending a psionic distress call he was sure Ms. Frost would hear even in her sleep. Eyes still seeing blobs of colour everywhere, he could just barely make out what looked like three bright yellow balls of light floating in mid air where his classmates had stood. Then one of the balls darted through the air and struck him full in the chest. He felt a wrenching motion, like being pulled sideways, and suddenly Jonothon Starsmore was no longer there.

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Emma Frost and Sean Cassidy entered the auditorium exactly ninety seconds after Jono sent his call. The lights were on, one crate was opened, and two small metal balls were lying inert on the floor. Of their students, there was no sign.

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Jono would have described the sensation as being kicked in the guts, if he still had any. Dimly, he registered several things. One, he was on a hard, cool surface. Two, the surface was most definitely NOT level. And three, something that sounded like a cross between Godzilla and a canary was yelling at him. In spite of his discomfort, Chamber raised his head off the floor and looked around. He almost wished he hadn't. Ev and Angelo were in a pile in the corner, M was floating in mid-air and looking around, and Paige and Jubilee were arguing over a console they were both holding onto for balance as the floor tilted sharply to one side, threatening to send them spilling into the boys. He didn't see Penance anywhere.

"I'm telling you, Guthrie, I've been on these things twice before and..."

"And I'm telling you I've studied Shi'ar mechanics and..."

The deck pitched again. Paige lost her balance and was tossed over the console and to the floor, protecting her head with her hands. Jubilee looked up towards the ceiling and shouted.

"Okay, knock it off! Computer, speak up!"

Jono tried to figure out why she was yelling at M, who looked as confused as any of them, when the ceiling shouted back.

"# Voice/linguistic recognition initiated, altering protocols to dominant Terran command system. Proceed. #"

"Well waddaya know? It worked!" Jubilee exclaimed.

Her self praise was cut short as the floor tilted again.

"Computer, stabilize flight pattern." Monet called out. From her position, she was unaffected by the jarring motions. Jono grabbed hold of what looked like a chair designed for something with three legs.

"# Complying. #" said the voice, sounding amazingly like that woman who gives the phone numbers on 411. The floor levelled out and the teenagers collected themselves in the centre of the large room. M landed lightly near them.

"Anyone know where we're at?" Angelo asked.

"Yup." Jubilee looked almost smug, "We're on a Shi'ar battlecruiser, somewhere in space. I know, cuz I've been on two, back when..."

The usual chorus of groans shut her up.

"Those balls were a form of teleportation." Everett said, his voice low as he looked around the bridge area.

The room was massive. The curved ceiling was rounded like a dome over the floor. Two rows of consoles and instrumentation with a variety of seats before them ran parallel to one wall, facing what could only be a huge viewscreen. Well over the height of a tall man a second level of instrument stations lined the wall, accessed by a walkway that ran halfway around the room. Extending from the far end of the room into the centre was a narrow extension ending in a cupola, or crow's nest. From there, a person could easily view everything going on in the room.

"That's the commander's station..." Jubilee indicated the cupola, "and those are crew stations. Shi'ar crews have all sorts of funky E.T.'s on them, so we get the Ikea seating from hell..."

"Big question is, chica..." Angelo started.

"...where's the crew?" Paige, Everett and Monet all finished at once. Monet sighed and stepped away from the group and looked at the viewscreen.

"Computer, identify ship and mission." The young Algerian demanded.

"Please." Everett added. Monet looked at him curiously. He shrugged. "No need to be rude, is there?"

Monet sighed again. "Computer, ship identity and mission... please."

"# This vessel is Shi'ar battlecruiser designate LL-9922, 'Kythiri's Glorious Dirge'. Current mission is patrol and supervision of outremer Imperium sector 14. Presently investigating pirate activity in solar system 3 of sector 14. #"

M seemed to consider this. "Computer, location of sector 14 relative to Sol system?"

The bridge was silent for a moment as the computer whirled.

"System Sol is 195,877 light years distant. Nearest stargate point of access is 2541 light years from present location."

Angelo whistled. "We're a loooong way from home, amigos. A galaxy far, far away. Big time"

"No kidding." Synch said. Everyone looked around the room uncomfortably.

"Okay, fine, so we're on the other side of the universe," Jubilee chimed in, "miles from a Wal-mart or decent Taco Bell. No problem. The ship can take us back through that Kurt Russel knock-off stargate. Right ship?" She looked around expectantly, but there was no reply. "Ummm.... Ship? Hello-Ooo? Confirm course to Earth? Please?"

Paige rubbed her chin. "S'funny... it worked for M."

"Maybe the computer's smarter than we are about listening to Jubes." Angelo cracked. Jubilee punched him in the shoulder.

Paige sighed and turned to M. "Would you try again, M? Ask it about taking us back to Earth?"

M nodded from where she floated in front of the viewscreen. "Computer, initiate course to Earth."

"# Unable to comply. Emergency protocols in effect. #"

"Emergency my butt!" Jubilee called out. "Listen to me you third rate intergalactic Fifth Element prop reject..."

"Computer." Ev broke in. Jubilee looked at him.

"# Awaiting instruction. #" the ship's voice spoke.

Ev grinned. "Sorry, not you, Computer, I was talking to my friend here..." he nodded towards Jubilee, who alternated between looking confused and annoyed.

"Say what?" she all but yelled.

Ev explained. "You have to address the ship as 'computer'..."

"# Awaiting instruction. #"

In spite of themselves, Paige, Ev, Angelo and Jubilee grinned as the electronic voice responded again. M looked down on them with characteristic demur.

"If you children are quite done..., perhaps we could focus on the problem at hand?"

Paige tried to look as leader-like as possible in her Ren & Stympy

t-shirt and slippers. "Okay, here's what we'll do. Ang', Jono, take a look around. See if you can find anything of use to us....  
Jono'?"

Starsmore, who had been standing silently until now, watching the exchange, stumbled against a console. Sparks flew from the edges of his scarf and his eyes glittered.

\*Teleport... gadget... disrupted... sick...\* Even his voice in their heads sounded wrong. Everett and Jubilee barely managed to catch him as he fell. That brought Penance bounding from the shadows. She perched on the console, looking down at Chamber, her face immobile, eyes focused on her friend. She didn't even notice her fingers and toes leaving deep gouges in the metal. M swooped down.

"Computer, location of med-lab?" she called out, all business, not the slightest touch of concern in her voice.

"# Deck 8, section B. #" A hovering gurney appeared from a slot in a nearby wall.

"# Automated med-response activated. #".

They placed Chamber on the gurney, which started to float towards a large door at the far wall. Paige almost followed, then stopped.

"Ang' take Penny an' go with him, and keep your eyes open."

"On it, chica. C'mon Penny." He waved at the silent girl, who sprung to the ground and followed along behind him and the gurney. Paige watched them go for a moment, then turned back to the others. To her surprise, they were already spreading out amidst the instruments.

"I know there's a control station here somewhere..." Jubilee was saying.

"I don't think we should touch anything..." Paige began.

"# Warning. Three Class-E starships on approach vector. Classification hostile. #"

Everyone looked at everyone else.

"Computer, viewscreen on." Jubilee shouted.

The screen shimmered to life. They all gasped audibly. It was the size of a large movie screen, and far clearer than any Earthside film screen could ever be. The young mutants were speechless in the face of an entire planetary system spread out before them, surrounded by more stars than even the clearest night sky on earth would ever show. A bright blue circle around what looked like a moving star drew everyone's attention.

"That must be our incoming hostile." M said.

"Computer, scan and identify." Paige said.

"# Voice recognition negative. Tactical operations not authorized. Please provide appropriate identification. #"

"What?" Paige and Jubilee said simultaneously.

"Computer, explain yourself... please." M said.

"# Automated functions allow only basic operations. Tactical operations require command crew interface. #"

M frowned. "Clearly it requires a recognized voice signature to process more important commands. No doubt logs and communications are similarly locked out. A sensible security precaution, but inconvenient."

"Very." Everett said, pointing at the screen, "Look." On the viewscreen, the approaching ship had drawn much closer. The ship was vaguely insectlike, almost like a large technological wasp bristling with armament and antennae. "I think we're about to be boarded."

"Computer," Jubilee shouted, "access your stupid files, under X-men, code name Jubilee... c'mon, I HAVE to be in there."

"# Processing. Voice recognition acknowledged... #"

Jubilee grinned smugly. "There, ya see. The Shi'ar empire knows class when it..."

"#... file warning in effect. Subject Jubilee to be restrained if ship integrity threatened. #"

Everett tried hard to keep in a grin. Paige failed miserably. So did M. If the ship had not jerked violently at that moment, there may well have been bloodshed.

"# Warning. Intruders detected. Decks 5, 7 and 8. Unable to initiate counter measures. Warning. #"

Paige's eyes went wide. "This is bad. Deck 8 is where..."

"...Skin and Penny are ready to protect Jono. We have to find out what the rest of our new friends want, yes?" M finished.

"But..." Paige started.

"You're right." Everett cut her off. "We split up? Two decks, two teams." M nodded. So did Paige. "And maybe we shouldn't shoot before we know who we're dealing with? For all we know, they could be friendly."

"Che'yeah, right." Jubilee said, echoing all their feelings.

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"You hear something, chica?"

Penance glanced out the door of the medlab, back at Angelo, and back at the door again. She leaned back on her heels and flexed the long narrow claws she had for fingers. Angelo nodded.

"Yeah, s'what I thought. 'Puter says Jono's stable, but don't wanna move him. The screen also says intruders on board. Do we hole up or go looking for trouble?"

Penance lowered her hands to the metal floor and crouched like a predator. Inhuman eyes glittered in the bright lighting.

"Yeah," Angelo sighed, "s'what I figured you'd think. Shit."

With quick glance at Jono, Skin moved out into the corridor. Penance followed silently.

The door swished shut behind them. The metal hallway was well lit, although Angelo briefly noted there was no obvious source of lighting. Penance moved almost soundlessly, her passage leaving slight scratches in the smooth floor and walls where her feet and hands brushed. Angelo followed close behind, actively wishing he was any one of several other places, including the dentist's office and a firefight in south central LA. The sound of heavy booted feet moving towards them snapped his reverie and made Penance stop short at a corner. She looked at him, face expressionless. Angelo listened, remembering Banshee's lessons on intelligence gathering. First step, know them before they know you. \_Right. No problemo,\_ he thought. A nearby door opened when one grey hand touched it, and Penance followed him in, just as the sounds of approaching boots rounded the corner. Angelo watched the door shut and waited. Pointlessly, he looked at Penny, holding one finger before his lips to signal silence. The boots passed right outside the door. \_Four, maybe. Shit. Where's the rest of the team? I need backup.\_ Voices echoed, suddenly, speaking no language he had ever heard before.

\_Not even shi'ar, and this was supposed to be one of their ships. Shit. Shit. Shit.\_

A moment later the boots stopped. A voice said something and another responded.

\_That's two.\_

Another voice. Harsh, commanding, seemingly directed at someone standing right in front of the door.

\_Three. Is that all...?\_

Angelo concentrated, pressing his ear against the door, forgetting a slight pressure from his hand had been enough to open it seconds earlier. The door swished open and he fell right out and onto the feet of a very large, very hostile looking alien in what was probably battle armour, pointing what was without a doubt a gun at the door. Angelo took in the scene. There were in fact four of them, \_Yay for me.\_, two wore full helmets that hid anything resembling a face, though one had bare arms that looked... scaly... another looked vaguely human, except that his skin was even greyer than Angelo's own, and in place of a nose he had a flat expanse of face with two slits that might be nostrils, and finally there was the owner of the feet and gun he was acutely aware of... seven feet tall, wearing only a leather harness and jockstrap, built like a cross between a professional wrestler and an alligator, with a face that was wide, lizard-like, and had the most teeth he had ever seen.

"Madre de dios... who's your dentist?" was all Angelo could think to say.

The lizard-alien reached down and picked him up easily in one clawed hand, lowering the heavy gun. He rasped something in a loud voice that brought what might be laughter from the other two. The wide mouth widened even more and his captor joined in the laughter. Angelo grinned as well. They laughed louder. He brought his hands up, fingers wide open in a gesture of helplessness. They laughed even harder. Two lengths of grey skin extended like whips from his forehead and hit the scaly alien in the eyes, hard. Grey fingers reached out and grabbed guns from the loose grips of two of the others. Laughter became shouts and the last alien raised his weapon, grey face showing shock and anger. A dark blur exploded from the dark room Angelo had just fallen from and the alien's gun fell into four pieces. He looked at it in shock as it fell to the ground.

The alien pulled another gun from his belt. Penance moved past him like a ghost, then turned and looked at him with expressionless blue eyes. The pirate raised his gun and it fell to three pieces before his eyes. An instant later his battle armour started to drop off as well.

The large lizard man stumbled back, releasing Angelo and reaching for its injured eyes. Angelo dropped and reversed one of the guns in his hands. Alien technology or not, the trigger and the end that went 'bang' were obvious. His first shot hit greyface in the chest, the remains of his heavy battle armour deflecting most of it but still with enough force to knock him down. Angelo turned towards the other two and started blasting the floor near their feet. Cursing loudly from behind their helmets, they slapped at what looked like metal cigarette packs on their belts. Both disappeared in bursts of blue energy. The large lizardman did the same as Angelo turned towards him.

"Wonderful." he said to Penance, who was crouching over the unconscious grey alien. "My first 'close encounter' goes down like a bad day in the barrio. What next?"

If Penance was going to respond, it was lost as the whole ship lurched heavily. Angelo wrapped his fingers around the alien's feet and started for the lift, dragging him behind. "I had to ask. C'mon Penny, back to the bridge."

\*\*\*

"Everyone cool?" Synch asked, walking back into the command center alongside Jubilee.

Paige and Angelo turned as they walked in. Penance was perched on another console, staring at the viewscreen. M was nearby, her back to the entrance. She didn't turn.

"So far so good. M an' I sent 'em packin'. That jolt was the bad guys' ships disengaging." Paige said. "Angelo and Penny even got us a prisoner."

"Sweet. Our guys did a fast fade as soon as we hit them with the patented Synch & Lee pyrotechnic special." Everett said, walking towards the alien bound into a chair with what looked like a cross



between saran wrap and duct tape. Jubilee elbowed Ev'.

"You DO, of course, mean \_Lee\_ & Synch. Hey! He looks just like one of those guys from 'Voyager'!"

Angelo waved a hand in the prisoner's direction. "One dif', Lee. They spoke english. \_He\_ sounds like a trash compactor with a cold."

"So, get Ms. Multiple-powers over there to telepath him, or is she busy buffing her nails?"

Paige shook her head. "Even worse. She started to study the controls to bypass the lock-out and went into one of her trances. No telling how long she'll be out for."

Jubilee threw a dirty look at the statue-like M. "Figures. Ev', can you synch with her and do the telepathy thing?"

Everett tilted his head thoughtfully. "I'm not sure. I can try."

"You sure?" Paige said, "TPs are supposed to train a whole lot before they go into others thoughts. And he's an alien. The book on telepaths said you need shields an'..."

"Look, Paige, I appreciate the concern, but we don't have many options unless you speak little-green-man." Everett grinned, taking the sting out of his words. "I'll give it a shot."

He stood and started to walk towards M. No one looked happy.

"Waitasec..." Jubilee looked at the ceiling, "Computer!"

"# Awaiting instruction. #"

"Is a translation program too important for us to borrow?"

"# Proceed. #"

"Cool." She turned to the alien, whose features had not changed throughout the exchange. "Okay E.T., what's the 411?"

The alien's green eyes widened slightly as the ship's computer played a translation over the young mutant's words, narrow-beam broadcasting them directly to his ears.

"I tell you nothing, pinkling."

Jubilee's brow wrinkled. "Did he just insult me? Computer, stop translation."

"# Acknowledged. #"

Jubilee turned to her fellow students. "Guys, bad cop -good cop, 'kay?"

"Ummm, Lee..." Paige started, but Jubilee had already signalled the computer to resume translating. Rolling up one sleeve of her oversized Yankees t-shirt, she walked over to the prisoner. Her hand

reached out, palm up and fingers curled slightly.

"This is a trick my friend Wolverine showed me. Now I don't go 'snikt'... but I think you'll get the idea..."

The alien sneered, then suddenly opened his mouth in shock as a bright pink oval of energy popped out of her palm, rose to just in front of his eye, and suddenly burst into a small explosion of flame with a loud 'paf'. An instant later, a second energy shape, this one a green zig-zag shape, floated up and burst before his other eye. The alien cursed something that the computer translated as 'egg-layer perforator'. Jubilee waited until his eyes cleared, then concentrated. Generating her plasmoids wasn't hard. Controlling their flight was getting easier. Controlling their shape was still a challenge. Her face looked outright hostile as a long, thin yellow shape played through the air before the alien's face for a moment, then curved and flew up one of the long slits of his 'nose'. Jubilee grinned her best `I'm-Wolverine-and-I'll-eat-you-if-I-have-to` grins.

"Now, the first answer you give that I don't like, 'paf', straight to the eggplant you call a brain."

Paige walked over as the alien's mouth opened and closed like a suffocating fish. "Where are the crew of this ship? Talk, before she gets impatient."

"Dead! Dead at Nebula's hand to a man! I swear it!" came the immediate response.

The others traded looks. Jubilee tried to keep her grin in place. Paige leaned in over her shoulder. "How?"

The alien's eyes blinked rapidly, four different lids opening and shutting in rapid succession. He made a sound like a dog coughing.

"I cannot tell you. It means my life!"

Angelo leaned in over Jubilee's other shoulder, speaking in his best Darth Vader voice. "Amigo, what makes you think it don't already? Look at her...", he inclined his head towards Jubilee, "I've seen this look, man. She gets it when she really wants to kill a guy."

Out of the alien's line of sight, Everett palmed his face and shook his head. Angelo was overdoing it. Fortunately the alien didn't know that.

"Satellite!" the prisoner shouted. "Nebula has built a satellite that taps directly into the anti-matter of the void. It erases organics, but leaves matter whole. This all I know."

"She used it on this ship?" Paige asked.

"Yes, yes. A preliminary test run. We come to system to test. Shi'ar show up, so we jam communications, we test on them first before..."

He trailed off, eyes scanning the faces before him.

"He's holding back." Angelo said, "I say kill him."

Jubilee started to clench her fist. She had no intention of really igniting the plasmoid, but Wolverine had used the same trick and it always seemed to work. At least, she thought it was a trick...

"Nonono! I tell!" the alien babbled, "This system is test! Two populated worlds, test fire, show Shi'ar, show everyone Nebula's power! I swear, that all, I...!"

There was only the slightest burst of blue light, and suddenly the alien faded right out of existence. There was a moment of general shock, then Jubilee summed up their feelings succinctly.

"Well, that just sucks."

Ev' nodded. "No kidding. That was just like the teleport effect they used before. Looks like the mothership called him home."

Paige pursed her lips. "Well, now we sort of know what we're dealing with. A space pirate with a super weapon that can wipe out a world." She paused and looked around. "Did ah really just say that?"

"#Incoming transmission overriding communications system...  
on-screen. #"

"I suppose it's too much to hope for that to be Rick Moranis?" Jubilee muttered.

The view of the solar system was abruptly replaced by a woman's face. She looked like a normal human, except for the blue skin. The look in her eyes, however, was anything but normal.

"Attention Imperial Guard. This is Nebula. Your crew is dead, your ship is damaged and aimlessly adrift. Surrender now and I will take you prisoner. I may even let you live. Respond immediately."

The young mutants looked at each other. Paige spoke first.

"I read an old Avengers file on her. Space pirate. Very bad news. She thinks genocide is a recreational sport."

"Yeah," Jubilee put in, "and she thinks we're a squad of Gladiator's bunch. That means she'll shoot first and ask questions later."

"Anyone want to bet if we tell her the truth we'll just end up in more trouble?" Synch asked. No one bothered answering. "We need time to either get this ship running or come up with something else. Any suggestions?"

"Amigos, anyone wanna bet if she coulda zapped us with the death-ray she would've already? I bet she's playing for time too." Angelo said.

"Question is, who needs it more?" Ev' added thoughtfully.

Paige dug her hands into her face and pulled away the skin, revealing a stone-like form underneath.

"Nebula's expecting the Imperial Guard... lets give them to her."

\*\*\*

Nebula sat at her command chair. She was quite obviously furious. Her crew knew the signs. She was silent, her fingers were drumming slowly across the armrest of her command chair, and she had executed the leader of the failed boarding party in a particularly messy fashion. Maintenance 'bots were still scrubbing away at the scorch marks. The man had been teleported back bound, and gibbering about his nose. She had shot him in the head first for that.

Her eyes scanned the readout on her control screen. The satellite was not yet charged and ready, but once it was it had to be used before the chain reaction went too far and backfired. Her intelligence had said nothing about an Imperial Guard team being assigned to this sector. Someone would die for this. Several someones.

"Get me that ship on-screen."

The crewman complied. The large viewscreen resolved into the image of the wounded Shi'ar heavy cruiser. It's broad, swept form tilted heavily to one side. Sparks still emerged where instrumentation had short circuited when the satellite had test-fired on it.

"Open a channel, now."

"Channel open, commander. They're receiving, but no reply."

"Fine. Let them listen and quiver. I expected no less from the overrated Shi'ar heroes."

\*\*\*

"# Incoming transmission. Acknowledge? #"

"Not yet, computer. Just receive." Everett looked around. "Everyone ready?"

"Almost," Jubilee said, "just one more little touch. Would you do the honours, mister Espinosa?"

Skin grinned, taking the offered item. "With pleasure." His fingers extended, then his arm. With a sweep of his hand, a large black bedsheet settled over M's floating form. Her face, covered by a pair of yellow goggles, just barely showed.

"Oh, VERY mature, guys." Paige said, grinning in spite of herself.

Nebula's voice echoed through the bridge. "Attention Imperial Guard, bootlickers of the Majestrix's lowest servants, this is Nebula. No doubt by now..."

Synch shook his head. "Man, she does like the sound of her own voice, doesn't she? We good to go?"

\*Not... without... me... y'aint.\*

All eyes turned. Jono stood in the doorway. He looked unsteady, but his flame, uncovered, was strong and bright. Nebula kept ranting over the relay.

"...die or serve me! My Death Ray is almost ready to purge this system..."

\*What's blue-babe on about?\*

Everett looked grim. "She has a death-beam mounted on a satellite. Apparently it can purge all life from a planet and leave the cities intact. This ship was a test."

\*Bloody. Oath.\*

"Yeah. That's what I thought."

\*So wot's the plan?\*

"Paige's idea. You'll see..."

\*You got some evil looks on yer mugs, people.\*

\*\*\*

"Commander, they're opening the channel!"

"...and then I will hunt you down and... what? On screen, imbecile, now!"

The screen resolved into the interior of a Shi'ar battlecruiser. The control stations were empty of crew and some damage was evident, but arrayed before her was... the Imperial Guard? Certainly that was Manta floating overhead, a dark shadowy figure, only the yellow of her face evident in her shadowcloak. And Impulse, a being of living energy, his helmet visor back to reveal power flickering from within. Her sources had reported him dead. Nebula made a mental note to have those sources killed. The other Guards were new to her. One who might be a female of Earthquake's rock-like race, stood proudly in front of the others. A tall being that seemed to be made almost entirely of energy, flickering in bursts of colour and shape that moved and changed, stood to her side. Next was a strange, dark female, long claws flexing as she studied the screen with intense, eerie eyes. Whatever race the creature was from, it looked deadly. The last one was truly terribly, grey tentacles descending from about its face, hiding all features but two hateful eyes. Some were new, but this was without a doubt the Imperial Guard. \_Damn them all to Death's embrace!\_

The stone-like one stepped forward. Her voice echoed powerfully.

"ATTENTION, PIRATE SCUM! THIS IS CADRE TRI-LAMBDA OF THE SHI'AR MAJESTRIX'S IMPERIAL GUARD. YOU ARE PUT ON NOTICE. SURRENDER YOUR VESSEL AND PREPARE TO BE BOARDED. YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES TO COMPLY. COMPUTER, END TRANSMISSION."

The screen cut off. Nebula blinked. The crew studiously avoided looking at her.

"How dare they? How DARE they?!?" No one responded. She casually tore the small viewscreen from it's mount on the side of her seat. "Control, come about. Target the vessel, but don't fire unless anyone tries to come across. I want them to watch as I eradicate all life from this system, one planet at a time!"

\*\*\*

"Hey!" Skin pointed at the screen, the grey strands of skin extended from his face slowly snapping back into place about his head and neck, "is she running for it?"

"Not likely. Probably going to blast us out of space now. Still, it was a good plan, Ev'. Ev? Earth to Everet?" Jubilee looked down from her perch on Synch's shoulders. His aura still snapped and hummed around them, but without her energy plasmoids providing the additional illusion of an energy being. She tapped him on the shoulder. The young mutant started as if woken from a dream.

"Huh, oh, sorry, Lee. Just thinking... I've never been in space before..."

"Trust me, you get used to it. Most of the ETs reek, and I don't even wana talk about the food... now lemme down."

"OKAY, WE'VE BOUGHT OURSELVES A FEW... OOPS, COMPUTER, DEACTIVATE VOICE MAGNIFICATION program..." Paige grinned sheepishly with stone teeth, "...sorry y'all."

Chamber took off his helmet and drew the flames back into his chest and face as much as he could, replacing his scarf. \*What's our next move, kiddies?\*

"Not a helluva lot if we can't get this ship moving." Skin said bitterly.

They all looked at each other silently. The spaceship hummed around them.

"Dammit!" Paige cursed, her accent becoming more pronounced in her anger, "This ain't right! We can't let her kill all a' those people!" She slammed her stone fist into a bulkhead, denting it noticeably.

"# Please refrain from damaging internal components. #" the ship said calmly.

Paige muttered something under her breath.

"# This unit is not equipped for that action. #"

\*Easy, Paige. We'll think of something.\*

Her eyes sought out Jono's. Jubilee broke the moment.

"Check out M-anta!"

Still covered by the yellow goggles and black cloak, M floated down from mid-air. The effect was almost eerie as she floated across the floor to a damaged console. Her hands began twisting wires and typing commands into the alien keyboard. Penance perched nearby and watched.

"She's gonna rig a latte machine... I just know it..." Jubilee mumbled. They all watched. After three long, long minutes, M stepped, or rather floated back. The mutants looked at each other. A moment later the ongoing hum of the spaceship took on a more vital, energetic tone.

"# Command system override complete. Full operational capacity restored. Initiating repairs. #"

Jubilee's jaw hung wide. "She did it. The zoned out beauty-queen actually hotwired a starship!"

Paige looked to the ceiling. "Computer, status report, short version."

"# Status summary: Weapons at 84%. Navigation at 63%. Engine power at 90%. Hull integrity at 88%. Power reserves at full. Shields nonfunctional. #"

Skin extended a finger and poked at a console. "Okay, amigos. Anyone know how to drive this thing?"

Jubilee almost leapt in the air. "I've been on these things before... no problemo... ummm..."

Synch rested a hand on Jubilee's shoulder and turned to Paige. "You've studied this tech, Paige. Any ideas?"

Paige actually stared at him for an instant. She was so used to people ignoring her attempts to lead that actually being deferred to was a bit of a shock. "Ummm... well..."

"Maybe start by finding the steering wheel?" Skin put in only slightly sarcastically, extending an elbow and leaning against the still form of M.

"Right... steering... okay..." Paige stared around the huge bridge area for a moment. "Computer, identify navigation controls, please."

A spotlight shone down on a wide and intricate console dead centre before the massive viewscreen. Paige looked at it for a moment.

"Angelo, you still the best 'Wing Commander' player in Westchester?"

"You serious, country mouse?"

She nodded. "That, and you're the only one who can reach all the controls. I think the last driver was an octopus or something."

"OooOokay." Angelo said, approaching the console

sceptically.

"Computer, weapons controls please?"

Another console lit up. Paige touched Synch's arm. "I think we need a cool head behind the guns."

"You got it. And I was always more of a Doom fan anyways." They both grinned and he started studying the console intently.

"Jono?"

\*Right 'ere.\*

"That looks like a scanning system. Think you can figure it out?"

\*Nope. But I ain't got much else to do.\*

"What about me, Guthrie? Sending me to squeegee the windshield?"

"Nope. You and me, Jubes, are going to run this show. After all, you DO have the most experience with these things. Join me in the command thingy?"

Jubilee looked from Paige to the command cupola overlooking the room and back again.

"Nope... but you can join me. Race ya!" With that, she turned and sprinted for the stairs spiralling up to the walkway. Paige sighed, husked off the stone form, and followed her. Ever silent, Penance watched them all from atop a computer terminal near M's still form.

Jubilee got to the cupola first, but waited for Paige to get there before starting her 'Captain Picard' impression, Victorian accent and all.

"Commander Laforge, that's you, Sparky, what've you got for us?"

\*I think I got this thing figured. Here... and don't call me that.\*

His hands moved across a panel and the viewscreen shifted drastically. It snapped back and forth rapidly, then focused on a distant dot that rapidly became bigger and clearer, resolving into the ship Nebula was on.

\*\*\*

"Comander Nebula. We're being scanned!"

Nebula looked at the crewman in shock. "Location?"

"The Shi'ar cruiser. Apparently not as damaged as we thought."

"I... see. Gunthar!"



A squat, muscular Rigellian turned his horselike face to her. "Yes, dread mistress?"

"Time to satellite readiness?"

"Power at 77% and rising, mistress. 19 minutes to firing readiness."

Nebula frowned. "We can't leave the satellite at this juncture. Radio the Scythe, Daemon and Ravenwing. Tell them to close on the cruiser and attack."

A skrull stationed at the communications console hesitated, then spoke. "Close on a Shi'ar battlecruiser with the Imperial Guard on board? Commander..."

"I didn't hear a disagreement from you, did I Thezyd?"

The crewman swallowed noisely. "No, commander. Never."

"Then do as I say."

\*\*\*

\*That's our friend Nebula's ship. These... \* Jono touched another spot on the panel and the view shifted past the ship to some indistinct dots further back, \*are more ships. Same highlights on the readouts, so I guess they're with her. Could be the ones't you chased off before.\*

"Can you find the death-ray?" Paige asked.

\*Maybe... this?\* The view shifted again, to another silvery dot roughly above the pirate craft.

\*Yeah, I think that's it.\*

Jono turned a knob and the image zoomed in. The satellite itself looked like a dead spider on it's back. The main 'body' of it was round and metallic, with several 'legs' like steel girders, sticking out and folding inward. The overall effect was just evil looking.

"Angelo, what's the deal?"

"Hang on... okay, I got this..." he passed his hand over a panel that lit up. A holographic grid appeared in the air above the console. Various alien symbols lined each axis. Small dots identified the cruiser and pirate vessels. "...si, 'kay, I pick the grid, push the buttons with the same symbols, computer takes us there. All I gotta do then is control the speed. No problemo... ummm, that is... I think I can move us in a straight line. I can give you Battlestar Galactica, but don't expect the Millennium Falcon."

"Say what?"

"Yeah, I can make it move."

"Good. Ev', how about you?"

Hunched over the keyboard, Synch waved his hand. "I'm working on it."

"Okay..." Paige closed her eyes for a moment, "Communications are out, either damaged or jammed. Anyone think we should just get out of here and let Nebula use that satellite?"

"Oh, puh-lease, Guthrie," Jubilee almost shouted, "We're the next generation of X-Men yaddayaddayadda... like a great man once said, 'lets go kick ET's butt! Ensign Espinosa... take us out!'"

Angelo shook his head, said "Aye-aye, captain. Setting course for the delta quadrant.", and touched the controls, his fingers stretched to twice their length. A single block on the grid lit up. He ran his finger across another panel and the entire ship pitched violently to one side. Jubilee and Paige barely managed to grab the rail of the cupola before being hurled to the floor below. "Sorry, I got it now."

"Lousy Spaceballs drivers..." Jubilee muttered.

"Computer, time to target satellite?" Paige called out.

"# At current heading and speed, 13 minutes. #"

"Okay... here we go..."

\*\*\*

"Commander! Imperial ship is on the move. Heading roughly towards the satellite!"

"What?!? What's our ships' time to intercept?" Nebula demanded.

"Three minutes."

"And the Shi'ar's time to the satellite?"

"At current speed and heading, fifteen at least. Either they're heavily damaged or the helmsman doesn't know a vertical thruster from an attitude jet."

"They are trying to prevent the satellite from firing. Notify our ships. Maximum speed and if that ship is not destroyed, I will personally murder the crews, their families, and quite possibly their worlds!"

\*\*\*

\*Incoming. I think they got weapons on us too.\*

Paige and Jubilee looked at each other, then back at the screen.

"Ev, tell me you got the weapons working? Please?" Jubilee shouted down.

Synch shook his head, hands tentatively touching buttons and panels. "I think so. I think so. I just can't get the targeting system down

straight... it keeps locking on to random space... let's see what this button does..."

\*\*\*

"Cap'n Nebula, enemy ship has fired. No hits, but they're targeting us now."

"Signal the attack ships. Close and destroy, now!!!" Her blue features dark with fury, Nebula glared at a Rigellian crewman working frantically at a console. "Gunthar! Time to satellite readiness?"

The Rigellian's horse-like face shook, nostrils flared, eyes wide, but his six fingers kept moving. "Nine minutes, dread lady. Mere minutes! My soul upon it!"

"Your life upon it, worm. Work faster!" Nebula turned back to the screen and watched her ships close on the much larger cruiser.

\*\*\*

\*I got three ships incoming fast. Readout makes 'em out t'be small, but armed to the teeth. I dunno, but I think the computer doesn't consider them too threatening.\*

Paige looked to where Jono stood. "Maybe, but we ain't exactly a trained Shi'ar crew. Ev' can ya fire across their path, maybe scare em off?"

"Working in it. The targeting system keeps locking onto things by itself."

"Ang," Jubilee shouted, "keep us away from them. Hit the hyper drive or something."

"Chica, I'm barely keeping us in a straight line... any faster and we're gonna overshoot the satellite and be in the next system before I can turn us around."

\*Hang on, kiddies... here the buggers come!\*

There was an instant of complete silence. Only the slight hum of the ship marred it. No one even breathed. Then the ship started shaking. The first few impacts were distinct, then suddenly a torrent of blasts struck the hull. Penance jumped down from her perch on a console. On the command platform, Jubilee and Paige had to brace themselves.

"Computer, damage report!" Paige called out.

"#Hull integrity at 80%. Damage from attacks negligible. Recommend immediate countermeasures. #"

"You heard the ship, Ev', make with the countermeasures!" Jubilee called out.

"I'm trying. now I keep getting no lock on anything..."

"Well, ferchissakes, just shoot! The armor's not gonna last forever!"

"You're the boss." Shaking his head, Synch hit a series of wide buttons. On the screen, red lines of energy and balls of bluish fire flashed across the blackness of space.

"Um, Ev', the bad guys are behind us just now..."

"Hey, do you want to do this...?" the rest of his reply was cut off as another series of attacks shook the deck beneath them. "Okay... enough is enough." Running his hand across a pad that was overlayed with a neon silhouette of the ship, Synch hit all the buttons again. The attacks suddenly stopped.

\*Ya got one, Ev'. He's drifting, out of the fight. Other two're pulling back.\* Jono's psionic voice was part excited, part relieved.

"Okay, we got us a breather," Paige straightened on the platform and forced her fingers to release the banister, "Ang, it's now or never."

His grey face a mass of concentration, Skin's extended fingers withdrew to near normal length. He clenched his right hand into a fist and brought it down on a square black button with a cry of "Hyperdrive on-line, princess!"

In spite of herself, Paige grinned. "Then let's go kill the Death Star!" The ship accelerated, the hum of the engines rising around them. On the screen, the white dot that was the satellite grew larger. Everyone's eyes, except for M, focused on the target. The bridge was silent until Jono broke into all their thoughts.

\*Incoming!\*

The ship shook from an attack. The effect was harder this time, each impact distinct and violent.

"# Warning. Di-photonic detonations on aft hull. Integrity at 62%.  
#"

"This sucks," Jubillee cursed, "the bad guys upgraded. Computer, we got shields yet?"

"# Negative. #"

"Aw, crud. Ang', now would be a good time to evade."

"Workin' on it.... I think they damaged something in the steering..."

\*Satellite's almost in range, but those two wankers are coming back. I think Nebula's coming to play too. Her ship's moving. \*

Another series of explosions hit the ship. Lights blinked, alarms sounded, and when it spoke, the computer's voice held just a hint of static.

"#Integrity at 52%. Hull breach on deck 7. Containment measures in effect. Deck is sealed.#

Angelo looked over his shoulder at the others. "Anyone wanna bet a hull breach is a really bad thing?"

"Focus, Ang'," Ev' called from his station, "we have a job to do. You've got to get us there so I can blow it up."

"What he said, grey." Jubilee swung down from the platform when Paige still stood, her eyes fixed on the steadily growing satellite. "Ev', you got this thing ready to rock yet?"

"I still can't get a good lock, Lee."

"Here, lemmee see, maybe it needs a more delicate touch..."

"That's it!" Ev' leaned forward, almost shoving Jubilee back from the console. "Lee, I could almost kiss you..." Jubilee opened her mouth to reply to that, but Everett was clearly not paying attention. "I had the sensitivity up too high. I was targetting space dust... There!" Synch's hand flew across the panels in front of him. "No, that's not it... oops, hope that wasn't important... okay... I think I got it... yes, Jubes, we are in business." He glanced back at Paige on the command deck, "Weapons primed and ready, captains. Lets go save the universe."

Paige loosened her grip on the banister yet again. "Jono, how far off are we?"

\*One minute to target, luv.\*

Another round of explosions shook them. The computer announced another breach in deck 12 had been sealed off.

\*Hope we make it.\*

\*\*\*

"Scans show cruiser is heavily damaged, but still operational."

"Time to satellite readiness?" Nebula demanded.

"Three minutes mistress. Power at 95%!"

"Mistress, Shi'ar cruiser is one minute from being in range of the satellite!"

"What are my ships doing, spitting at them? Those di-photonics can decimate a small city, blast it. All main guns target the shi'ar. They must not interfere. Full barrage on my command!"

\*\*\*

\*Thirty seconds to target.\*

"Ev, be ready, Angelo, stand by to get us outta here. Lee, grab on to something. Here we go, people!"

"Hey, hayseed, nice command voice."

"Jubes."

"Yeah?"

"Bite me."

\*Fifteen... incoming, BIG incoming, we got a ship moving into our line of fire!\*

"Looks like Nebula decided to play after all. Ev'..."

"I'm on it, Paige, firing..."

\*\*\*

"Mistress, they fire upon us!"

"Evade worm, evade and return fire."

"Done, dread Lady!"

\*\*\*

"#Hull integrity at 36%. Recommend immediate withdrawal.  
#"

\*Eight...7 seconds to target, Nebula and the little ships are closing in... 5... 4..."

The ship was hit again. Hard. Everyone lurched abruptly to their right as everything tilted.

\*We're there! Fire, mate, fire!\*

"Ev, do it."

"Firing! Weapons away!"

"I'm getting us clear, hang on!" Angelo shouted. The ship seemed to tilt forward hard, making them all struggle to balance, then it shot forwards. Jono and Angelo's readouts showed them moving away from the other ships at a pace that barely indicated the huge distances they were covering. Shouts rang out amidst the smoke that was starting to fill the command centre.

\*Bollocks.. look at the scanner.\*

"We missed. Shit, shit, SHIT! We missed!"

\*We got three hostiles closing, kiddies.\*

"Angelo, have we still got helm control?"

"Barely chica. Can't promise anything fancy."

"Fine. Turn us around and take us back in. Ev', target the satellite with everything we have."

"Are you totally off your rocker, Guthrie? This is a Shi'ar battlecruiser, not the 'Enterprise-VR' down at the mall. We barely know what we're doing up here!"

"We're not leaving two worlds worth of people to die just because we haven't covered Star Wars 101 in class, yet, Lee."

"Did you husk your braincells? We barely got outta there last time! We gotta come up with something else."

"This is the last thing they'd expect us to do is head back in. Ang', we set?"

"On a wing and prayer, chica."

"Jono, can those ships intercept us?"

\*Best pray they don't, sunshine.\*

"Then..." Paige hesitated.

Jubilee didn't. "ENGAGE!"

"Ang'!" Everett called out, his eyes on the screens, "Can you give me a better shot this time?"

"Madre de... it's all I can do not to pitch us into a sun or something... what I need is a control pad, or a..." Angelo looked over at Ev', his grey eyes narrowing. "You remember the last Star Trek flic?"

"`Insurrection`? What about it?"

"Well, if it can work for that loser Riker, it can work for me... Computer, give me manual controls."

"# Acknowledged. #"

Panel on Angelo's armrests slid open. Two black attachments that could best be described as joysticks rose out and locked into place. Angelo leaned back in his chair.

"Okay. \_Now \_ you're gonna see some flying."

\*\*\*

The shi'ar ship banked and circled, gaining speed as Skin directed it towards the immobile satellite. The two small pirate spaceships followed, the Nebula's larger ship in their wake. Weaponry the likes of which Earth's greatest armies could never imagine tore into the massive Shi'ar ship. Explosions and flame decorated it's hull. One of the smaller ships, its commander encouraged by the lack of evasion by the Shi'ar, ordered his ship in closer. When the massive cruiser banked on its side and went into a barrel roll, the pirate was struck on the nosecone the wingtip of the crescent shaped cruiser. The damaged ship was left drifting in space.

\*\*\*

"I can't believe you just did that!" Jubilee shouted from where she

swung from M's leg.

"Sorry chica, these controls are sensitive."

\*Don't take the piss outta him yet. Ang' just nailed one of the bad guys with that trick.\*

Paige shook her head. How much longer could their luck hold? Jono's mindshout broke into her thoughts.

\*Sod it! Nebula's closing on us!\*

"Ang', man, get us there, we can't take much more!" Jubilee called. Angelo nodded but she was already turning to Synch. "Ev', have you got the shot?"

"I got it, but the targeting is going haywire. I was lucky to get some kind of lock-on."

Jubilee nodded again and turned to look at Paige above. "Okay, Guthrie, your show."

\*\*\*

"Dread Mistress Nebula! Power at 100%!"

"Initiate firing sequence. Wipe that world out!"

\*\*\*

Paige started to loosen her hold on the banister again, then gave up and gripped for all she was worth. She looked across the bridge, her eyes seeing everything, focusing on no one thing. The targeting screens, the steering hologram, the massive viewscreen, the look on her teammates' faces. All of it resolved into one big picture. She saw the pirate ships closing, saw the satellite up ahead, saw the weapon's indicators light up as they locked onto the target. And more importantly, when the time was right, she just knew.

"FIRE!"

Ev' hammered the buttons and shouted. "Go!"

Logically, weapons that fire streams of energy and light should travel to their target almost instantly. Yet every one of the young people on that bridge would have sworn there was a lull of dead silence for at least five whole long seconds. On the main screen, a blue-white flame lit up the blackness of space.

Cheers echoed through the bridge a moment later.

"Yes!"

"We did it!"

"Nice shootin', Tex!"

\*That's showin' the blighters, mates.\*

"# WARNING. PROXIMITY ALERT!!! #"



"The screen!" Paige called out, "Look at the screen!"

It was Nebula's ship. Roughly half the size of the Shi'ar cruiser, but undamaged and fully powered. The massive black and silver craft was closing in on them. There were flickers of light across its surface, then the shots impacted a moment later. The cruiser rocked heavily. Alarm bells sounded. The computer called out warnings in english and shi'ar.

\*\*\*

On the pirate command ship, Nebula had just shot Gunthar. She was standing now, her face a mask of blue hatred.

"They dare. THEY DARE! All weapons to full, DESTROY THAT SHIP!!!"

\*\*\*

Paige struggled to hold on to the railing. "Ang, get us out of here, now!"

"I'm trying, but the steering's all messed up. We can't get up to speed!"

"Ev', can we fight?"

"Negative, I have no targeting. Point me at her and maybe I can get something to work."

The ship rocked again. The computer was more static than anything else. On the screen, the pirate flagship filled the picture.

\*She's comin' around for another pass, kiddies. Anyone's got bright ideas, now's time for 'em.\*

"Just one," Angelo muttered, "Weesa people gonna die."

"# WARNING: EMERGENCY TELEPORT TRACING/RECALL ACTIVATED FROM REMOTE LOCATION. #"

There was a wrenching sensation, a burst of heat, and suddenly they were sitting on the gymnasium floor, back in Massachusetts, except for M who floated above it, still in her Imperial Guard costume.

"You're back!!!" It was Banshee. He was screaming, at least, that was how his voice sounded to all of them. "When Lilandra told Charles she could reverse the teleport sequence, we didn't dare hope..."

"I've scanned them all, Sean." Emma Frost's calm voice broke in, "They are well, but they've had an interesting time. I think I had best contact Charles. Lilandra should learn of this."

"Nice ta see you too, Frosty." Jubilee quipped. The exhaustion and relief overlaying the sarcasm in her voice was enough for Frost to let the comment pass this time. One by one, the startled young mutants rose to their feet, shaking off the effects of the teleport

"Madre de dios... are we still alive?"

"Ah don't believe it..."

"Someone got an aspirin? Maybe ten of them?"

"Why am I dressed like this?"

Banshee looked at Emma's departing back, then at the kids, who were climbing to their feet. "Ye triggered an emergency teleport relay. The Shi'ar equivalent of a parachute. It carried ye to the original ship the devices had come from. Once Lilandra figured out where ye were, she was able to trigger a recall. Where'd ye end up? What happened?"

"Excuse me, teacher." M spoke from where she floated, "I would first like to know why I am dressed like this?"

The others looked from one to the next. Most grinned, except for Jono who just shook his head. Jubilee opened her mouth, fully prepared to launch into a full telling of their adventure. Everett nudged Angelo, who snaked out a long grey finger, effectively gagging their team-mate.

"If it's all the same to you, sir," Paige said, waving her arm to include all of them, "ah think we could all use a good night's sleep first."

Exhausted nods and general agreement followed. Banshee's mouth opened and shut a few times, then he sighed, shrugged, and held the door for them as they filed out of the gym. Once outside, they started to walk towards the dorms. Sean paused alongside Everett, who had stopped and was staring at the dawn sky. The last few stars were fading. Penance crouched by his feet, likewise staring, expressionless as always.

"See something new, lad?"

"I think I just realized something, sir. I'm just not sure what. I mean, we were in space... there were worlds, and aliens... and..."

"Wee bit overwhelming?"

"No sir. I mean yes, I mean... I just hope I get to see a bit more of it next time. Maybe without being shot at?"

"I'll tell ye, lad, the shootin' part seems ta pop up more often then not. Still... wait... shot at? Never mind... get ta bed, Everett. Tell me the whole thing later. Much later. Ye all made it home, and that's what's important."

Ev' yawned. "That and one other thing, sir."

"What's that, then?"

"I never want to hear anyone complain about us spending too much time playing video games, ever again."

\*\*\*

The shi'ar cruiser exploded. Nebula watched the debris spread out in space. Her crew remained silent at their posts, desperately trying not to attract her attention. Nebula ignored them. They were nothing. The shi'ar were nothing. She would salvage whatever was left of her satellite and return to make them all pay. A crewman's shout broke her dreams of bloody vengeance.

"Mistress! Incoming vessels. Two, three... five of them."

"By Death's embrace, what now?" she screamed.

A cold voice broke in on the ship's communications system.

"ATTENTION PIRATE VESSEL. THIS IS THE SHI`AR CRUISER 'OVERWING'. WITH US ARE FOUR OTHER SHI`AR WARSHIPS. SURRENDER OR DIE."

\*\*\*

----FIN------(that's french for THE END,  
btw...)----

\*\*\*\*\*

Well, I hope you enjoyed that. It was a lot of fun to write. I'd like to give a huge thanks to Harlequin for a most excellent beta-read. Thanks as well to Hawk for information on Nebula, Tapestry, Kaylee and Seraph for additional beta-reading efforts, and the gang on #subcafe for periodically answering various questions.

If you enjoyed this story, I really would appreciate any feedback you might care to send to

Abyss cr492@ncf.ca

Even a short 'I liked it', 'I hated it', or 'Which Spice Girl are you again?' is appreciated.

Also, if you liked it, please feel free to check out some of my other fan-fic work, which can be found at various fanfic archives around the internut.

Jaya's ItyyBitty Archives -  
<http://members.xoom.com/JayaKay/main.htm>

Matt Nute's page - <http://www.jps.net/nute/>

Indigo Sky Network - <http://www.indigosky.net/>

Ro's resurrection of Lori's archive -  
<http://www2.crosswinds.net/indianapolis/~jhanne/x-men/index.html>

fanfiction.net - <http://207.155.119.8/>

Alara's Maggie Awards site -  
<http://alara.dreamhost.com/xbooks/awards.html>

Ascian's site - <http://www.wolverinejubilee.com>

MissyRedX's site -  
<http://members.xoom.com/MissyRedX/index.htm>

Harlequin's site - <http://genx.noderunner.net>

...and a few others amidst the many excellent archives you can find via CFAN.

If you have an archive you'd like to place this story on, e-mail me first.

Thassit and thassall. 'til next time,

Keep the faith.

Abyss !--mstheme--!--msnavigation--!--msnavigation--

End  
file.